



# Consanguinity and Charity: A Cultural Study on the Different Fates Between Lanzhi and Ruth

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**Abstract:** Both *The Bride of Jiao Zhongqing* and *Ruth* share the same literary theme: a woman's fate in ancient societies. Both of them have the same relationship, daughter-in-law and mother. However, the fates of these two daughters-in-law are quite contrary. Their fates have been determined by their societies with different cultural structures. Consanguinity, a preference of a feudal, patriarchal culture, is reflected through Lanzhi's tragedy while charity, a preference of a Judeo-Christian culture, is reflected through Ruth's happy end. A social preference relies on the culture: whether the saint or God is regarded as the final determinant of this world.

**Keywords:** Lanzhi, Ruth, Consanguinity, Charity, Culture

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## 1. Introduction

To many Chinese readers, *The Bride of Jiao Zhongqing* also known as *The Flying Southeastwards of Love-Lorn Peacock* is a well known story. It has been selected as a wonderful classical Chinese ballad in the Philology text book for Chinese Senior High School Students. This ballad was about the tragic story of a Chinese woman in feudal society. The story's introduction says, "Jiao Zhongqing was a local official in the Prefecture of Lujiang during the reign of Jian'an (AD 196-219) in the Eastern Han Dynasty. His wife Liu was sent away by his mother and Liu vowed never to marry again. Compelled by her family to break her vow, she had no recourse but to drown herself in a pond. On the receipt of this news Jiao Zhongqing hanged himself in his courtyard. The long poem was composed by their contemporaries from their memory." [1] Liu was the family name of the bride of Jiao Zhongqing. Lanzhi was her first name. The poem was translated into English by Gladys Yang and Xianyi Yang who were a couple and noted translators of Chinese literature. Readers can find the translated work named *Yuefu Songs with Regular Five-Syllable Lines* (thereafter abbreviate as *YSRFSL* for later quotation in this paper).

## 2. Analysis

### 2.1. Lanzhi's Problem

What was wrong with Lanzhi? Let's see what her husband reported to his mother:

"Less than three years have we been wedded now;

Our life together is a budding flower.

Lanzhi methinks, has done her best, no less.

Why treat her, then, with such unkindness?"

To which the shrewish mother made reply,

'Dull are your wits and foolish, O my son!

Your wife lacks graces and she lacks good sense.

See her for what she is, self-willed and vain.

The very sight of her offends my eyes.

I wonder that you dare to plead her case!

A proper wife I have in mind for you,

Yonder she lives, a maid called Qin Luofu,

A matchless beauty, upon my words,

And I have ways to compass her consent.

Now listen! We must get your slut away!

Yes, go must she, and go without delay!" (YSRFSL 108-9)

Obviously, Lanzhi got on well with her husband but did not with her mother-in-law. Here are the faults condemned by her mother-in-law as unacceptable: lack of graces and good sense, and being self-willed and vain. Zhongqing's mother was trying to

get Lanzhi away by replacing her with a very beautiful maid. According to these condemnations, the new maid for Zhongqing would be graceful, have good sense, and be dependent and humble. But none of these qualities were mentioned as a requirement for the new maid. The only quality of the new maid was matchless beauty. Of course, if Lanzhi had lacked graces and good sense, had been self-willed and vain, she would not have known her place in the family. Is it true?

“... ”

Twins in the depth of winter, I recall,  
I first came to this house a timid bride.  
I bore myself with filial reverence,  
Was never obstinate, self-willed or rude.  
For three years, day and night, I toiled for her.  
Nor heeded how long that sorry state might last,  
My only care to serve your mother's will  
And to pay the love you bore to me.  
Yet from this house I now am driven out,  
To what avail to bring me back again?” (YSRFSL 110).

These are the complaints that Lanzhi made to her husband about what she had done in the family when she heard the news that Zhongqing's mother had already decided to send her away. She was timid, filial and not rude, how could she lack graces and good sense? She was not obstinate, how could she be self-willed? She was patient and humble, how could she be vain? Besides, she was a hard-working house wife. However she did not please her mother-in-law. If her mother-in-law was right, she must have been a bad woman. As a bad woman, she might have had bad relationships with her family members. But she had a very good relationship with her husband. How about with her husband's sister? There were only four members in this family: Zhongqing's mother, Zhongqing, Lanzhi and Zhongqing's sister. Let's see Lanzhi's farewell to Zhongqing's sister:

“Then, trickling down her cheeks warm tears,  
She bade farewell to Zhongqing's sister dear:  
‘When to this house I first came as a bride,  
Dear sister, you were just a naughty child.  
See, you have grown well nigh as tall as I.  
Now I must bid a hasty, long farewell;  
Yet, if you love me, sister, for my sake,  
Be gentle to your mother, care for her.  
When all the maidens hold their festivals,  
Forget not her who once looked after you’”(YSRFSL 112).

Many readers agree that this passage is one of the most moving and distressing part of the story. Not only does it manifest her deep love for Zhongqing's sister, but also it reveals what virtues she had. She was indeed a nice lady. She did not have the faults her mother-in-law accuses her of possessing. In fact, the accusations were all lies by her mother-in-law. Why was her mother-in-law deliberately lying through her teeth? In essence, her mother-in-law was extremely irritated with Lanzhi's willful manner. Opposing the feudal hierarchical culture, a willful manner is severely criticized in Chinese feudal society. As a rule, either in the West or in the East, a person who is graceless, senseless and vain is always disapproved of. But why was a willful person

disapproved of in Chinese feudal culture? Let's see how willful Lanzhi was:

“At length in sorrow to Zhongqing she said,  
‘If I have failed to serve your mother well,  
Useless to stay... Please go and tell her so.  
Should she think fit, I fain would go away.’” (YSRFSL 108).

This is the only sign showed Lanzhi's willful manner. But she was not really willful at all. She just wanted to listen to the advice from her mother-in-law, who thought this request was an absolute challenge to the family hierarchical authority. Zhongqing's mother was the absolute authority in this feudal family. Obviously, Zhongqing's father had died, and there were no other elder brothers in this family, so it was the mother who should be designated as the authority of the family. This family system was a patriarchal organization characterized by an hierarchical order and arbitrary power. This means that the upper status members could always rule the lower status members and, therefore, the lower status members like the daughter-in-law were never allowed to make their own decisions. So we are not surprised to notice Zhongqing's mother's hostility to Lanzhi's request.

## 2.2. Ruth's Problem

Ruth's husband was dead and she lived with her mother-in-law Naomi in Moab. When Naomi decided to leave Moab to Judah where she suggested Ruth not going with her since she was unable to give birth to another son for Ruth. However, Ruth clung to her. Then Naomi respected Ruth's request.

“But Ruth replies, ‘Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me.’ When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.” (Ruth 1: 16-8) [2]

Why did Ruth follow her mother-in-law who was rather poor and miserable? As a Moabitess, Ruth believed that the Israelite people could be her people and the Israelite God her God; however, her sister-in-law Orpah went back to the Moabite people and Moabite gods. Ruth actually converted from her Moabite gods to the Israelite God, with the presupposition that the one God should deal with every human being fairly and justly. Therefore, Israelite society under Almighty God's manipulation should be fair and just. If this is true, we can assume that from the Israelite society to the community and then to the family all these organizations shared the same belief, and finally that the Israelite people had a specific custom of charity. Ruth's own story shows how the Israelites are kind to her—a poor and miserable foreign lady. Is this an exception?

## 2.3. Israelites' Kindness to Their Daughters-In-Law

“Do not oppress an alien; you yourselves know how it feels to be aliens, because you were aliens in Egypt” (Exodus 23: 9).

“And the word of the LORD came again to Zechariah: ‘This is

what the LORD Almighty says: ‘Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor.’” (Zechariah 7: 8-10).

Interestingly, God’s words delivered to the Israelites either by Moses or by Zechariah did not contain a reason why the Israelites should do so. As we know, the Israelites were oppressed by the Egyptians, while the people at the time of Zechariah did not listen to God. Hence the words of God was a proclamation of faith that the Israelites should follow. Generally speaking, it is through reason that people know what is true, and it is through faith that people know what should be right. So reason or faith, which should predominate? It is indeed a hard choice for the Israelites. In the biblical tradition, faith very often predominates over reason. Do the Israelite individuals follow faith by treating other people well?

“Just then Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the harvesters, ‘The LORD be with you!’ ‘The LORD bless you!’ they called back.” (Ruth 2: 4)

“The LORD be with you!” or “The LORD bless you!” These were actually daily greetings among Israelites who lived in a community. In a sense, how people greet each other daily shows their judgement on what is most important for daily life. For the Israelites, it is the Almighty LORD that bears the most important implication for their daily life. Why has it ever been so? To put it in a simple way, God is the creator of this world, and although He showed his people favour, He never asked them to return it; therefore the Israelites regarded God as the most important thing for their daily life. Of course, God is far beyond a thing, God is a supernatural being which cannot be proven by human knowledge. Interestingly, a traditional Chinese greeting for people who live in the nearby community is “*Chi fan le ma?*” Literally, it means “*Have you eaten your meal?*” Obviously, Chinese people regard food as the most important thing for their daily life. To a great extent, this judgement is true since no one could survive without food. As another Chinese proverb says, “*Min yi shi wei tian (The masses regard food as their heaven)*”, so their heaven is something essentially material. Nevertheless the crucial question is not about whether materialism is more ontological than spiritualism or vice versa. Rather the question is how to balance the qualities of materialism and spiritualism. In other words, people cannot survive without food, nor can they survive just for food. However, to the Israelites, even food itself is an evidence that God reveals his kindness or blessing to human beings. Other evidence in *Ruth* also demonstrates how often the Israelites emphasize God’s kindness or blessing for their community. Here are some examples:

To a new acquaintance:

“May the LORD repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.” (Ruth 2: 12)

To a lover, when the speaker hesitates to make a prompt answer:

“The LORD bless you, my daughter,” he replied. “This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier: You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor.”

(Ruth 3: 10)

To an acquaintance who need others’ witness:

“Then the elders and all those at the gate said, ‘We are witnesses. May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel.’” (Ruth 4: 11)

To a neighbour who has a new grandson:

“The woman said to Naomi: ‘Praise be to the LORD who this day has not left you without a kinsman-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel!’” (Ruth 4: 14)

How about in a family?

“The LORD bless him!” Naomi said to her daughter-in-law. “He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead.” (Ruth 2: 20)

Obviously, the Israelites have formed a custom which embodies God’s kindness, grace or gift to all human kind. They bless each other when they meet, they rescue the poor who cry for help, they assist fatherless children, they make widows feel warm and happy. Whoever you are, a stranger, a passer-by, an alien, an acquaintance, a neighbor or a friend, they are quite ready to help you if you need the help. But why should they be so helpful? In this case, Ruth was a foreign lady; why should people like Boaz help her when they met with her the first time?

“At this, she bowed down with her face to the ground. She exclaimed, ‘Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you noticed me—a foreigner?’

Boaz replied, ‘I have been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband—how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before. May the LORD repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.’” (Ruth 2: 10-12)

Contrast to the cruelty of Lanzhi’s mother-in-law to Lanzhi, the kindness of Naomi to Ruth was witnessed in the guidance Naomi offered to Ruth. The relationship between Naomi and Ruth was so sharply contrasted to that one between Lanzhi’s mother-in-law and her.

“One day Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, ‘My daughter, should I not try to find a home for you, where you will be well provided for? Is not Boaz, with whose servant girls you have been, a kinsman of ours? Tonight he will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor. Wash and perfume yourself, and put on your best clothes. Then go down to the threshing floor, but don’t let him know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking. When he lies down, note the place where he is lying. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do.’” (Ruth 3: 1-4)

As we have noticed, the purpose of this detailed guidance is to find a home for Ruth. In doing so, Naomi must find a future-husband for Ruth. Why was Boaz the most suitable future-husband for Ruth? Because Ruth was familiar to Boaz who was also a kinsman redeemer in accordance with Ruth’s former husband’s family. Further, Naomi had been waiting for an opportunity to let Ruth be with Boaz privately. Then there was the opportunity of winnowing barley on the threshing floor at night. Once more, the detailed guidance shows how

sincerely that Naomi cared about her daughter-in-law.

### 3. Comparison

#### 3.1. Ruth's Deed and Belief

Contrary to this kindness, Lanzhi's mother-in-law was cruel and despotic to her. Her mother-in-law also deliberately found a home for her who eventually had to choose the pond despairingly. Unlike Ruth, she was not favored by her mother-in-law, not even by her own brother. Ruth was lucky since she was both favored by her mother-in-law and her kinsman Boaz.

Of course, Ruth was favored by Boaz because of her good deed. And Boaz considered this favor would be repaid by the LORD regardless of who she was. But why did Ruth deserve the favor? Apparently it was because of her kindness, love and care to her mother-in-law, but it had nothing to do with the LORD's reward. In other words, her kindness, love and care were all the phenomena but not the essence. What caused her good deed was essentially that the LORD was living in her soul. As the foremost of the Ten Commandments says, "*You shall have no other gods before me.*" What made Ruth so persistent that she decided never to leave her mother-in-law was just the belief in "*your God my God*". Thus Ruth was deserving of the favor because of her belief in the LORD. As the fifth commandment says, "*Honor your father and mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.*" Why should this commandment be after the first commandment? Definitely, the first commandment predominates over the other commandments. Coincidentally, the story of Ruth is actually illustrating the Christian faith.

A remarkable feature of this favor is a completely free gift which the receiver was never expected to return. Boaz never asked Ruth to return his favor, nor did Naomi ask Ruth to do so. If to the mammonists, these sacrifices would be unthinkable or unbelievable. Indeed these are really sacrifices. Why should the Israelites commit sacrifices? If the people come to recognize the grace of God, and God never asks them to return His favor, they moved, inspired or filled with gratitude for this undeserved favor from God and then began voluntarily to transfer their favor to other people. This is what we define as charity. Charity is highly respected in the Israelite community." In the Israelite community the enterprise of charity and spirit of cooperation are combined by the Israelites, hence this combination has greatly enforced social relations among the communities. ... For Judaism charity is primarily a religious duty." [3] Though Ruth was a foreigner in the Israelite community, what she did to her mother-in-law conformed to the Israelite religious duty. As for her repayment, some charitable activities were provided for her by Boaz and his villagers. Considerable charitable gifts were offered by Boaz and his servants. All these happenings were not unusual occurrences in the Israelite community. There is much evidence for this charity in the *Old Testament*.

"When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest.

Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the LORD your God." (Leviticus 19: 9-10)

"When you beat the olives from your trees, do not go over the branches a second time. Leave what remains for the alien, the fatherless and the widow. When you harvest the grapes in your vineyard, do not go over the vines again. Leave what remains for the alien, the fatherless and the widow." (Deuteronomy 24: 20-21)

#### 3.2. Charity

Gleanings, grapes and olives and so on; these were all the living resources for the Israelites as well as for the non-Israelites at that time. The LORD your God always commands you to leave some of these resources for those people who badly needed them. Who are these people? They are the alien, the fatherless, the poor, the widow and so on. Why did the Israelites commit themselves to this sacrifice? As a Chinese scholar notices, "the Jews believe that God has bestowed on Israel three great gifts which have all been achieved through calamities. These three gifts are *Torah*, land and the next life. Broadly speaking, the *Torah* means both the truth which God reveal to the Israelites and the tenets or guidance to humankind. ... For over 2500 years, the *Torah* has not only been the foundation stone of the spirituality of the Jews, but also has been deeply influential in the rise of Christianity and Islam. The *Torah* has ever played and will continue to play an extraordinary role in the world. To some extent, how Westerners have become the present Westerners is partially because of what the *Torah* said or is going to say, because people believe what it said or is going to say." [4] Is it an arbitrary conclusion? If there were no impact on Christianity from Judaism, we would not be so sure that the Jewish morality has had its influence in shaping the spirit of the present Western world. As Max Weber described the relationship between these two issues, "through its numerous related features, Old Testament morality was able to give a powerful impetus to that spirit of self-righteous and sober legality which was so characteristic of the worldly asceticism of this form of Protestantism." [5] One of the most important elements of Jewish morality is charity. Charity is an inevitable part of the morality which demonstrates religious faith. The remarkable examples of the philanthropists and their religious faith are therefore intriguing topics for us today. Through the ten shining examples of philanthropists in the Victorian Era investigated by Ian Bradley, we can perceive a strong link between religious faith and the entrepreneurs. Thus this strong link has eventually been internalized as a charitable business ethic." Only two were outside the Nonconformist fold—Thomas Holloway, ... and Andrew Carnegie, ... For the rest it is scarcely too much to claim religion as the moving force behind both their commercial enterprise and their enlightened beneficence." [6] For Westerners, there is a common sense that charity has more or less been integrated with religious faith, yet for Chinese people, this common sense seems quite unusual or abnormal. Charity has been a key element in the Judeo-Christian tradition. But from what is being shown in the Chinese literature, consanguinity has been a key element in the Confucian tradition.

How has it ever been so?

### 3.3. Lanzhi's Deed and Ethics

Through the careful study of *The Bride of Jiao Zhongqing*, we find out that all the faults Lanzhi bore were pretexts by her mother-in-law, except her unawareness of her place in the family. "*Brides must know their place*", her mother-in-law told her. This criticism essentially implies a principle for any bride in that society. Zhongqing's mother gave Lanzhi this warning not for an individual case, since "*their place*" implies that all the brides in that society indeed shared the same status. If we look at Lanzhi's situation in the families, we can find out where her place was in those families. First, in her husband's family, she was oppressed by her mother-in-law and consequently was driven away from the family. Secondly, in her brother's family (which was formerly her family), she had to come back when she was driven away from her husband's family. How was she treated by her own brother who was then the head of the family?

"But Lanzhi's brother, ever worldly-wise,  
Was never slow to seize a heaven-sent chance,  
And to his sister spoke blunt words and harsh:  
'See you not, girl, how much this profits you?  
Your former husband held a petty post.  
Now comes an offer from the Prefect's son:  
A greater contrast would be hard to find.  
Turn down this offer if you will, this prize,  
But think not I shall find you daily rice!" (YSRFSL 115-6)

What a cruel brother! He was worldly-wise. What he could foresee was the profit that his sister would make for his family. His threat to his sister was deadly. How could he have the power over his sister's marriage? Clearly, Lanzhi had no father at this time. As a Chinese saying for the women in feudal society goes, "*An elder brother is the substitute for your father when you lose your father.*" Lanzhi's brother was older than her. So her brother entailed the patriarchal power to mandate his sister's marriage. There was no clue whether her mother was ever against her brother's will when he autocratically made his decision for his sister. In fact there was no authority for her mother to handle this issue. So all Lanzhi could do was to obey her brother.

"'Brother,' she said, 'what you have said is good.  
I was a wife and now am none again;  
I left you once and then came back again  
To dwell beneath your hospitable roof.  
Your will is such as cannot be gainsaid.  
True, to Zhongqing I gave my plighted word,  
Yet faint the hope of seeing him again!  
Your counsel I must welcome as a boon:  
Pray you, arrange the ceremony soon.'" (YSRFSL 116)

Did Lanzhi really believe that what her brother had decided was good? No, it was not true. What was true is that she had given Zhongqing her word. Her brother was going to ruin her promise. She could not stop this disaster since she had been trapped in a miserable family situation. Neither could she go back to her husband's family nor could she keep staying in her brother's family. In order to see her true love for the last time,

she had to pretend to agree to what her brother decided. This pretence is revealed in the last meeting of the former couple.

"But all we hoped is now an empty dream.  
My mother you knew well. My tyrant brother,  
'Twas he who schemed to wed me to another.  
Now that the die is cast by fate austere,  
What more can you expect of me,  
my dear?" (YSRFSL 118)

### 3.4. Consanguinity

Lanzhi drowned herself in the pond on her new wedding day. And Zhongqing hanged himself from his courtyard tree when he got the sad news of his true-love's death. The love story was sadly a tragedy. And what was the cause of the tragedy?" Within the framework of a conventional love story, the poem constructs a devastating indictment of the old moral and social order." [7] No doubt, those who made the old moral and social order are to be blamed. Her mother-in-law? Her own brother? It seems true that they were the two arbitrary familial rulers who caused the tragedy. Examining the relative positions in the families, we find out that Lanzhi's place was the lowest on the adult level. In her husband's family, the order of the family members is ranked as Zhongqing's mother, Zhongqing, Zhongqing's sister, and Lanzhi; while in her brother's family, the order is ranked as her brother, her mother, and Lanzhi. These orders show the degree of power of every member in the family. This is actually the principle of consanguinity in Chinese feudal culture. Apparently it was an individual like Lanzhi's mother-in-law or Lanzhi's brother who caused the tragedy; but essentially it was a Chinese feudal group who had determined the tragedy. In the Chinese feudal matrix, in groups of organization (whether they are families, villages, towns or nations), all their members (whether they are the parents, children, the neighbours, the officers or the kings), were obligated to follow the same moral law—consanguinity. The foremost criterion of consanguinity is the predisposition of the patriarchal order. What does patriarchy actually mean in Chinese matrix? According to Gu Xiegang (1893-1980), a famous Chinese historian and expert in Chinese folklore, "Patriarchy is a key institution in the feudal society of Chinese culture and also the familial system featuring the authority of father or clan elder who organizes the property-sharing large families linked by ties of blood. Distinguished from those large families in the primitive society where there was no exploitation, these large families have survived in the class society." [8] So far there is nothing strictly related to the clan elder in the story of *The Bride of Jiao Zhongqing*. And both the father of Zhongqing and the father of Lanzhi are absent in the story. Zhongqing had a tyrant mother while Lanzhi had a tyrant brother. However, these two tyrants actually represented the authority of the fathers who were absent in the families. It is justified as a virtue that in Chinese feudal society when women came to the family power they nevertheless should represent the interests of their husbands' family rather than those of their own fathers' families. So Lanzhi's mother-in-law was in fact a patriarchal image. It was the patriarchal power that enables her to compel Lanzhi to leave the family. What could legitimize this patriarchal power?

According to *The Book of Rituals*, “if a husband loves his wife but his parents are not pleased by his wife, then his wife has to be driven out of the family. If a husband does not love his wife yet his parents are pleased by his wife, then the husband has to treat his wife well all through his life. There are seven criteria according to which a wife can be driven out of the family, the foremost one is due to her disobedience to her parents-in-law.” [9] *The Book of Rituals* is one of the most important classics of Confucianism. The emphasis on the rituals was actually the law for the Chinese people then. We can see that the emphasis on filial piety is placed over the emphasis on the love between husband and wife. This means parents are more important than children. Hence parents are regarded as superior to children. Therefore even in a family, the members are not all equal. The order is Father → Mother → Son → Daughter → Daughter-in-law. In an empire, the order is identified as Emperor → Empress → Countryman → Countrywoman. As we know, the family and the empire share the same structure according to the rituals. The essence of this structure is patriarchy. “Thus we can see that patriarchy originated from the slave society in China. On the one hand, patriarchy has actually been a blood tie to maintain a family; on the other hand, it has become a ruling system to balance and to share political or economic power with its function of blood ties.” [10]

The second criterion of consanguinity is the precedence of the blood relation over other issues. Approximately, there are two types of blood relation. The one is diachronic and the other is synchronic. The parents-children blood tie is a diachronic blood relation, while the brother-brother, brother-sister or sister-sister blood ties are synchronous blood relationships. In Chinese feudal society these blood relations have been synthesized into a single system. Namely, the foremost tie is consanguinity. Even such a sainted educators as Confucius himself was predisposed to consanguinity. In *The Analects*, there is a dialogue between Confucius and Duke Ye about what honesty is. “Duke Ye told Confucius, ‘so honest is a young man of my party that he even proved his father’s stealing of a sheep.’ Yet Confucius replied, ‘my party members have very different settings of honesty from yours. Father covers the fault of his son, and son covers the fault of his father, hence honesty is inside the cover-up.’” [11] Why did Confucius make such a ridiculous judgement? To put it in a simple way, Confucius placed consanguinity in a superior position to other issues, even to a fact. While Confucius primarily emphasized the role of consanguinity within a family, Mencius was eager to conclude the function of consanguinity for a whole nation. “If everybody loves his or her parents, respects his or her elders, then all over the nation there will be peace.” [12] After Confucius, Mencius had further applied the rule of consanguinity for the ruling of a nation. From the ruling of a family to the ruling of a nation, these two manipulations shared the same function. Ever since then the application of the principle of consanguinity has become a common practice of Confucianism. Is it intelligible to ordinary Chinese people? As a philosopher, Mencius again put the principle of consanguinity as the logos of the universe.”

Who are the most important people for us to serve? It is our own parents. What is the most important thing for us to handle? It is the handling of ourselves for not being unjust. I have heard of someone who is righteous to other people as well as being devoted to his or her own parents, but I have never heard of someone who is not righteous to other people while being devoted to his or her parents. We must do what we should: serve our parents. The devotion to our parents is the basis of all our devotion.” [13] From this sharp contrast, we see that Mencius does regard consanguinity (the devotion to one’s own parents particularly) as more important than justice. This idea of Mencius is contrary to the one of Aristotle. As Aristotle said, “In Justice is all Virtue found in sum. And Justice is perfect virtue because it is the practice of perfect virtue; and perfect in a special degree, because its possessor can practise his virtue towards others and not merely by himself; for there are many who can practise in their own private affairs but cannot do so in their relations with another.” [14] Though both Mencius and Aristotle put Justice as perfect virtue because Justice is not only to oneself but also to others, their “others” are totally different. For Mencius, his “others” refers to other people, not including one’s own parents; but for Aristotle, his “others” refers to all other people including one’s own parents. Therefore according to the idea of Mencius, the devotion to one’s parents or relatives is superior to justice. Why was Mencius so prone to consanguinity that his idea sounds unfair? In fact, just before his famous sayings above, he gave an analogical explanation. “As the way already exists nearby, people do not have to seek the faraway one; as the work is clearly easy, people do not have to make it difficult.” [15] To Mencius and other Confucian thinkers, consanguinity is just like the way nearby. Our work will be much easy if we apply the idea of consanguinity.

The idea of consanguinity also has been manifested in other books of Confucianism. *Shangshu (The Ancient Book of History)* is the historical archive of the earliest political events or affairs in ancient China about 2600-4000 years ago. One of the ancient kings named Shun was the shining example of the principle of consanguinity. Two times he avoided being killed by his step-mother and his half brother, yet his own father (unfortunately a blind man) was too prejudiced to believe this conspiracy, and disliked him more than ever. How could Shun get along with his parents?” To his parents, he always criticized his own faults and actively revealed his own evil. Whenever he saw his blind father, he was always prudent and respectful. And finally his father was moved by his deed since his moral virtue was approved by the gods...” [16] Shun’s story tells the Chinese people how important their tolerance to their parents is. Why should people be tolerant towards their parent’s injustice? Consanguinity is more important than justice. In this superiority the function of *Li* (ritual) has been actually achieved. In *The Book of Rituals* there is a magnificent interpretation for *Li*. “*Li* is a criterion which tells people whether they are of blood or not; it is a criterion which decides whether the deed is suspicious or not; it is a criterion which distinguishes whether a thing is the same or not; it is a criterion which shows whether a rule is right or wrong.” [17]

## 4. Exploration

### 4.1. The Ideologies as Explanations Why Ruth Had Good Fortune

By analyzing the differences between *The Bride of Jiao Zhongqing* and *Ruth*, we see the different social moral principles between Chinese society and Western society in their traditions. The most different is the contrast between consanguinity and charity. To follow the principle of consanguinity, you have to put blood relationships before non-blood relationships. This could explain why Lanzhi was rebuked by her mother-in-law for the pretended faults. Essentially, it is because of her identity. She was a family member through a non-blood relationship with her husband's family. Therefore she was the inferior member in this family and consequently was thought to deserve blame by her mother-in-law. Then in her brother's family where she had a blood relationship, why was she also regarded as the inferior member? The formidable moral obligation of consanguinity is the submission toward patriarchal power. Under this circumstance, while her father was absent, her brother was the agent who could wield this power over his sister.

Meanwhile in the principle of charity, you do not have to put blood relations before non-blood relations. Ruth was not a blood relation of Naomi but Naomi never thought that Ruth was inferior to her own sons. Neither did Naomi rebuke Ruth, nor did Ruth offend Naomi. The love and affection between Naomi and Ruth is impressive. This is the virtue which one should love her/his neighbour as herself/himself; in a family, her/his daughter-in-law as herself/himself. This virtue is actually charity. It is needless to say that this charitable relation set a shining example for the mother-in-law/daughter relation thereafter. So what is the cornerstone of the charitable relation? The evidence shows that it is the faith of Naomi and Ruth. It is by faith that they dedicate themselves to loving God. As God once said to the Israelites:

"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me." (Ex 20: 2-3)

Also as Jesus said to the Pharisees:

"Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. And this is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: love your neighbour as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Mt 22: 37-40)

Hence it was the same for Naomi and Ruth. They love God above all other things and their neighbors as themselves. Their love of God is the core of the virtue which is thus defined as charity. And then their love for their neighbors, and their family members, or even their countrymen, these are the strata of love. But how do we confirm that their love of God is above all other things?

"And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us." (Romans 5: 4-5)

This is the "hope" in Christianity; is there a "hope" in Judaism? Moreover, this race (the Jewish people) had

suffered so much brutal oppression in history that they had to seek the kindness and justice from God. Therefore hope had been formed as a key buttress of Judaism." [18] Then how could this "hope" buttress their love of God? "Hope" is another expression of faith in believing in God." The love for God is not an active choice by human beings, rather it is a passive acceptance of Agape—Faith; Christian's love towards their fellow men has been presented as what Agape has done in the same way; this love is actually the transference of Agape among fellow men." [19] Clearly, the diachronic route of the love could briefly be described as Agape (the Love from God)→The Love of God→The Love for fellow men. For human beings, there is no way to manipulate God's love. What they are able to do is to love God, a principle which is regarded as the first and greatest commandment. Further, this commandment determines the other commandments, including the principle of love toward fellow men. The love shown by human beings, whether it is toward God or other human beings, is charity. The assumption of charity relies on the assumption of Agape. If there is the existence of Agape, there must be the existence of God. Therefore it is the belief in God that can support the foundation of charitable relations.

### 4.2. The Ideologies as Explanations Why Lanzhi Had Bad Fortune

Interestingly, the traditional Chinese belief in gods is very different from the Judeo-Christian belief in God. According to ancient Chinese mythology, it was *Pangu* (a male god) who created the universe from chaos with his axe. It was *Nüwa* (a female god) who created human beings from yellow clay and built up a marital system for the reproduction of human beings. It was *Fuxi* (a male god) who invented the Eight Divination of Diagrams which symbolizes the beginning of the formation of ancient Chinese letters. It was also him who taught people how to hunt, fish and make musical instruments. So in a way his activity is regarded as the beginning of Chinese civilization. Of course, there are many other gods and goddesses who were exclusively in charge of a particular human affair. Like ancient Greek mythology, ancient Chinese mythology is a vivid panoramic picture of polytheism. Most importantly, contrary to the monotheism of the Judeo-Christian tradition, all the deities are essentially certain transformations of human beings themselves. In the strict sense, the belief in these deities is not a theistic faith. As Karl Marx once concluded, "All mythology overcomes and dominates and shapes the forces of nature in the imagination and by the imagination; it therefore vanishes with the advent of real mastery over them." [20] Truly it had already vanished when Lao-Tzu was contemplating what the *Tao* really is." Tao creates one, one creates two, two creates three, and three creates a multitude." [21] Of course, in the Taoist philosophy, 'one' means *qi* which could be approximately interpreted as "ethos". 'Two' means Yin and Yang. 'Three' means Heqi which is the conflation by Yin and Yang. Whether Tao is a spiritual entity or a material entity, Lao-Tzu never clarified. Lao-Tzu did regard Tao as the creator of the universe. However, while he was discussing the law of the universe, he put Tao in a place inferior to nature. He said, "Mankind imitates

earth, earth imitates heaven, heaven imitates Tao, and Tao imitates nature.” [22] If Tao was the Creator of the universe, how could it inferior to a part of the universe (nature is a part of the universe) which it had created? This is obviously a defect in Lao-Tzu’s philosophy. We do not deliberately take issue with Lao-Tzu for this defect since the idea that “Tao imitates nature” is already a fundamental idea of Taoism. Lao-Tzu had actually denied the existence of the Creator. As another Chinese scholar noticed, “Lao-Tzu denies the willful God by applying the proposition of Tao imitates nature. ... This is just the beginning of a philosophy which complies with the law of the universe. It is the beginning of the denial of religion.” [23]

If Lao-Tzu had already denied religion, how were Confucius’ attitudes towards it? In the *Analects* there are several times when Confucius and his disciples were discussing the topic related to religion. Jilu enquired about deities of Confucius, Confucius answered, ‘How could you serve the deities since you have not served the humans?’ Jilu asked again, ‘What will it be like when a person dies?’ Confucius answered, ‘As you do not know life, how could you know death?’ [24] Relying on the empirical evidence, Confucius was very careful not to acknowledge the deities or the afterlife. He was rather an agnostic. Neither did he claim to be a theorist nor did he think himself as a philosopher. As an educator, he put moral virtue as something crucial. Thus in his practical behavior, he was as cautious as possible.” Confucius never talks about a strange man, a giant, a murderer (especially the killing of one’s superior) or a deity.” [25] Of course, a strange man is unpleasant for her/his unusual look or abnormal behavior. A murderer is hated for her/his killing. But a giant like Hercules, a deity like Athena, are entities who should be commended in Hellenic polytheistic culture. There were also Chinese polytheistic cultures prior to the epoch of Confucius. Why did Confucius disapprove of the giant and the deity? The moral principle was very clear to Confucius that both the giant and the deity were supernatural beings who could not actually live in human society. In his empirical sense, these supernatural beings were not real at all. Thus they could play no actual role in human society, let alone for a more specific role concerning moral principles.

As a teacher, Confucius put the emphasis on wisdom for his disciples.” Fanchi enquires about wisdom of Confucius, Confucius answered, ‘Dedicate yourself to civilizing the people, respect the deities yet distance yourself from them, these can show your wisdom.’” [26] This is a typical case which allows us to pin down the Confucian wisdom precisely. In Confucius’ view, it is human dedication to practical affairs that can govern human intelligence. It is not the divine manipulation that can guarantee human beings who can make good decisions or judgements. Therefore Confucius was largely oriented towards the activities conducted by human beings instead of the miracles caused by deities. Though he left space for the worship to the deities, he nevertheless did not believe in the function of this worship.

What is common to both Lao-Tzu and Confucius is the fact that neither of them had developed a religious idea. From them on, Chinese thoughts of irreligious elements has been dominated in the history of Chinese civilization and finally

caused a lack of religion in Chinese culture. It therefore offered the opportunity for something else to take the place of religion. The very thing is consanguinity. As charity is the fundamental moral principle in the Judeo-Christian tradition, so in the Chinese tradition it is consanguinity that has the same function which generates love for other people. For the ancient Chinese and even for Confucius himself, the direct and fundamental love meant to them was the love from their parents, brothers or sisters. The indirect and less fundamental love meant to them was the love from their grandparents, great uncles or great aunts and so on. The farthest love they could trace back was that from their ancestors. If there had been no ancestors, they would not have existed. They knew the connections to their ancestors by family trees, records or documents. And in China, the family trees are all kept in patrilineal sequences, never in matrilineal sequences. All in all, they believed these connections must be true and gradually they built up their worship for ancestors who were empirically more real than the deities. Most strikingly, all these “ancestors” must be males, never females. Far before the time of Confucius, the principle of male superiority had been formed even in primitive Chinese society. As a matter of fact, a man’s physical power is generally stronger than that of a woman.” In stockbreeding and farming, the proportion of labor by men or women had changed and this caused the rise of the male’s economic status, hence a transition from the female centered matrilineal clan society to the male-centered patrilineal clan society was inevitable though this transition took a very long time.” [27] The occurrence of this transition did not seem unusual in any primitive societies including the Chinese one. The crucial thing is that Confucianism was absolutely created as the ideology which sanctifies the principle of male superiority. In the famous *Sishu* (*The Four Books: the Great Learning, the Doctrine of the Mean, the Analects of Confucius and Mencius*), there are plenty of examples on how to follow the principle of male superiority.

“...the father created the grand business, the son inherits it thence ...”

“...for a long time his son has been following the virtue of the father, his son is really filial and pious.” (Bojun Yang 304)

“...‘inside the family father and son, outside the family king and officers, these are the utmost human relationships’...” [28]

Truly, there were no mentions of mother, daughter or sister, let alone of daughter-in-law. Patriarchal authority has always been one of the key issues in the *Sishu* which was chosen as the textbook for the imperial examinations later on.

## 5. Conclusion

The patriarchal authority and the love for blood relations have greatly shaped Chinese culture. They are the two elements which illustrate the principle of consanguinity in Chinese culture. It is by this understanding that we can figure out the cause of Lanzhi’s tragedy. The Love of *Zuzong* (patriarchal ancestors) → The Love of *Qinren* (the blood relations) → The Love of *Taren* (fellow men but not blood relations), this rank



shows the ladder of love in traditional Chinese culture. Lanzhi was neither a member of the patrilineal line, nor was she a member of blood relations in her husband's family. Owing to her inferior membership in the families, the love toward her most decreased and she was even neglected. According to the principle of consanguinity, her actual membership could only be acknowledged as a *Taren* who was a family member of non-blood relation in her husband's family. This was why her mother-in-law was able to find an excuse to expel her from the family. The Chinese *Zuzong* were not always altruists. To a great extent, they were self-interested like all human beings, whereas God in Judeo-Christian tradition is designated as a love-giver who is a super being transcendentally than human beings and therefore is altruist. In this sense, Ruth was lucky.

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